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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: UNMIK POSTPONES MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY. Outgoing SRSG Soren Jessen-Petersen announced June 17 his decision to postpone municipal elections scheduled for this autumn for a period not to exceed twelve months. Jessen-Petersen's decision provides that elections cannot be held earlier than three months or later than six months after the date of any UN Security Council's decision determining Kosovo's final status. Local political party reaction was unsurprising; governing coalition political parties welcomed the delay, while opposition parties disapproved. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) On June 17 UNMIK head Soren Jessen-Petersen made a long-awaited decision to delay municipal elections scheduled for this autumn. Elected in 2002, municipal assembly mandates end in autumn 2006. The SRSG's decision includes a provision to take legislative action to extend municipal terms of office until the next election. Jessen-Petersen said he arrived at his decision to delay after months of consultations with political parties, the UN's Special Envoy for status talks Martti Ahtisaari, and international stakeholders. According to the decision, municipal elections should be held no later than June 2007, but within the window of no earlier than three months before or later than six months after the UN Security Council makes its determination on Kosovo's final political status.

13. (SBU) Representatives from governing coalition parties -- senior partner Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and junior member the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) -- have told the media and USOP that they support the delay. Opposition political parties have not been enthusiastic. AAK secretary general Ahmet Isufi and Democratic Party of Kosovo

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(PDK) party vice-president Fatmir Limaj had earlier told poloff that their parties favored postponement as their resources were tied up in status negotiations work. The SRSG's statement said "the postponement will allow for the political focus on the status talks to be retained."

14. (U) Media reported that PDK spokesperson Vlora Citaku said that elections were postponed at a time when changes in

Kosovo's municipal leadership is most needed. Labinot Hoxha from Veton Surroi's Reform Party Ora, told poloff in May 2006 that his party favors conducting elections as scheduled. (NOTE: The PDK has majorities in two of Kosovo's 30 municipal assemblies; PRO did not participate in the last municipal elections and therefore does not have a single seat in any municipal assembly. END NOTE.)

15. (U) U.S. Office Pristina clears this cable for release in its entirety to U.N. Special Envoy for Kosovo Martti Ahtisaari.
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